# News Briefs

### NASA, space command announce cooperative efforts

NASA and the Air Force Space Command have agreed to work together in the hopes of saving both organizations costs and sharing in new technologies to benefit future spaceflight and spacecraft. Teams will study seven areas of potential cooperation.

### Solar storm spotted by SOHO spacecraft

A large eruption on the Sun was detected on April 7 by the Solar and Heliospheric Observatory, or SOHO spacecraft. The solar eruption is called a coronal mass ejection.

### Low ozone measured over north pole

Unusually low levels of ozone over the Arctic were measured during March by satellite-based monitoring instruments operated by NASA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Centered in a stable, nearly circular region over the North Pole, the average March ozone amounts were 40 percent lower than the average March amounts observed between 1979 and 1982.

### Hubble tracks fading gamma-ray burst

NASA's refurbished Hubble Space Telescope has made an important contribution toward solving one of astronomy's greatest enigmas by allowing astronomers to continue watching the fading visible-light counterpart of a gamma-ray burst, one of the most energetic and mysterious events in the universe. The so-called optical counterpart is presumably a cooling fireball from the catastrophic event that triggered the massive burst of invisible gamma rays—the highest-energy radiation in the universe. This event may have unleashed as much energy in a few seconds as the Sun does in 10 billion years.

### Plant growth increases during '80s

Plant growth in Earth's northern regions increased by 10 percent from 1981 to 1991, and by the end of this period annual growth began about eight days earlier, according to new NASA-funded research. These findings imply that vegetation in northern high latitudes, between 45-70 degrees North, is actively responding to previously reported measurements of increasing atmospheric carbon dioxide levels and warmer-than-average surface temperatures.

Space News ROUNDUP!

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Editor . . . . . .Kelly Humphries
Managing Editor . . .Karen Schmidt

# Three astronauts round out STS-90 crew

**By Eileen Hawley**

Rick Searfoss will command a 16-day mission to study the ability of humans to operate in a microgravity environment for an extended period of time. Joining Searfoss on *Columbia*'s flight deck will be Pilot Scott Altman and Mission Specialist Kay Hire. STS-90 is scheduled for a March 1998 launch.

They will join Richard Linnehan and Dave Rhys Williams of the Canadian Space Agency, who were named in August 1996 to support the STS-90 Neurolab mission, and two payload specialists who will be selected closer to flight.

Searfoss, 40, has flown twice on the shuttle, as pilot on STS-58 on *Columbia* in 1993 and most recently as pilot on *Atlantis*' third docking with the Russian Mir Space Station in March 1996. STS-90 will be Searfoss' first flight as a shuttle commander.

Altman and Hire, both 37, are members of the 1995 Astronaut Class, making their first trip to space after completing more than a year of training to prepare for assignment to shuttle flights and supporting technical assignments within the Astronaut Office.

Four candidates currently are training for selection as prime and backup payload specialist positions on STS-90. Jay Buckey, Alexander Dunlap, Chiaki Mukai and James Pawelczyk were named in April 1996. Two will fly on the mission, with the remaining two serving as backup or alternate payload specialists ready to fly on the mission if necessary.

Investigations during the Neurolab mission will focus on the effects of microgravity on the nervous system. Specifically, experiments will study the adaptation of the vestibular system and space adaptation syndrome, the adaptation of the central nervous system and the pathways which control the ability to sense location in the absence of gravity, and the effect of microgravity on a developing nervous system.

# American Heritage Week celebration needs volunteers

JSC will celebrate its cultural diversity the week of July 7-11 and organizers are looking for volunteers.

"Both civil servant and contractor volunteers are needed to help make American Heritage Week another smashing success," said June Bennett Larsen of JSC's Flight Crew Operations Directorate, and one of this year's coordinators. "You may volunteer as much time as you would like."

Individuals may volunteer for one hour or more. Volunteers are needed to greet and assist entertainers, pick up food and decorations, help decorate, serve food, sit with exhibits and clean up.

"For those who would like to help promote American Heritage Week, dress up in a wonderful costume (of your own design, of course, circa 1776), and tell us that you want to be a Town Crier," Larsen added.

To volunteer, employees may call Larsen at x36080 or the Equal Opportunity Programs Office at x30601. Volunteers should send electronic mail to jlarsen@ems.jsc.nasa.gov

TEAM NASA

**JSC PICNIC—More than 2,500 employees attended the JSC EAA picnic April 6. Top: The Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo speakers provided dance lessons to JSC employees and Bugs Bunny. The speakers provided afternoon entertainment consisting of the Lone Star Cowboy band, a melodrama skit, dancing and singers. Left: Sylvester teaches younger JSC members how to do the Macareana. The annual picnic was held in the A&W Ranch at Astroworld. Employees enjoyed all-you-can eat barbecue, footlong hot-dogs, soft drinks and ice cream. Face painters rounded out afternoon activities.**

JSC Photos S97-04903, S97-04905
by Ginger Gibson

# Strategic plan meeting outlines JSC's future

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missions down the road."

McMonagle also discussed space suit hardware modifications being developed to give crews the ability to resize the suit on-orbit. With these modifications, he said, one torso and backpack with interchangeable parts can support several crew members.

The EVA Project Office also is responsible for risk mitigation activities for the space station. This involves verifying that tools for building the station will work with one another and function in the demanding space environment. For instance, 5,600 interface tests were conducted before STS-82, the Hubble servicing mission, McMonagle said.

A new lead center function at JSC is the Space Operations Management Office, headed by O'Neill. "It is an agency-wide responsibility that has been given to JSC as part of the entire process of moving responsibility for our programs and support of those programs from Headquarters down to the centers," O'Neill said.

SOMO's origin lies in challenges put forth by the White House National Performance Review initiative and the NASA Zero Base Budget Review, completed in the Spring of 1995, he said. An implementation review and recommendations from the Space Operations Streamlining Team culminated in the establishment of SOMO in the fall of 1995.

"Our function consists of planning, acquiring, and deploying those operational services across the agency that are needed for the design, mission preparation, and flight execution phase of all our NASA space flight programs," O'Neill said. SOMO's scope includes the worldwide communications networks: the Tracking and Data Relay Satellite network, ground networks, and command, control, and data processing facilities across the agency.

Other SOMO goals include reducing duplication and overlap across the agency, placing NASA employee emphasis on R&D and science, transferring operations services functions to the private sector or universities where possible, and reducing operations costs to enable new programs within a limited budget.

Stone, of Mission Operations, talked about meeting the challenges of upgrading the orbiter fleet. MOD has embarked on new projects including several partnerships designed to further operations concepts and development across the agency.

"We have partnered with Engineering and NASA research centers, primarily Ames and JPL, to utilize technology that more effectively allows us to perform space station planning and execution," he said.

Stone also discussed developing new technologies that would benefit not only the Mission Control Center, the shuttle and station programs, but would be used in the future for Moon and Mars exploration mission. These technologies include onboard and distance training, which would be used in long term space exploration. He emphasized using the MCC as a test bed for operations concepts and operations development, and its flexibility to support other programs.

"When we fly to Mars, many of the things the control center has to do today will have to be done onboard, and it is those kinds of technologies we are trying to pursue to position ourselves for the future," Stone said.

The next Strategic Planning All Hands meeting is scheduled for May. The date and times have not been set.

# Computer users now may use E-mail to reach help desk

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the help desk since January 1994.

"Right now we're still in a transition, learning all the different functions of support provided—network problems, servers, workstations, mail issues," she explained. "Right now, we're cross training. Every four weeks, each group goes and sits with another group and gets an overview and detailed training. The plan is that when someone calls with a question we'll be able to answer the question or resolve the problem on the first call. That's the goal."

The second phase of the improvement effort—now in progress—will tailor training for end users, use remote diagnostics and knowledge-based tools, improve standardization of hardware and software, increase user awareness through Roundup articles and JSC's Intranet homepage, and decrease the administrative overhead associated with providing service.

End users can do a number of things to help further minimize the number of help desk calls, which in turn reduces the wait time for those who do call. To seek status of a problem in work, the user can send an E-mail note to the HELP DESK address in the global address list (formerly ISOC—Help Desk) rather than placing a call to the Help Desk. Similarly, if assistance with how to use the features of a software package, e.g. Word, Excel, etc., is needed, consultation is available through someone in the user's work group or the ISD Customer Service Agent. Finally, if the user is working with a package that is new or is trying to use a software function they haven't needed before, they may contact the training organization in the Human Resources Office to register for one of their classes.

Plans for the remainder of this fiscal year include bringing the center up to the hardware and software levels specified in JSC's standards, increasing user support in the office environment through the use of dedicated support and increased participation of Customer Service Agents, installing tools to help automate some of labor-intensive activities, and improved training aimed at helping users become more proficient in the use of information technology tools.

'We have a lot of hard working people here," Branham said. "We care about the user community out here and we try to do our best every call."

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